

GPS III Competition Pushed Back Until Next Year, Official Says

A key date for the military's new Global Positioning System satellite constellation, the release of a request for proposals, has been pushed back to 2003, according to a Defense Department official involved in the program.

The Air Force has been discussing plans to release the RFP for GPS III "sometime this winter," the official told *The DAILY*. "I believe it's going to be after the first of the calendar year."

Scheduled for first launch in 2010 or 2011, GPS III is to provide enhanced targeting capabilities and be considerably more difficult to jam than the current GPS II constellation. The Air Force recently completed the first phase of the GPS III program, in which Boeing, Lockheed Martin and Spectrum Astro provided architecture studies for the new system.

But after the Air Force canceled an "industry day" in the spring, there has been no word on when the program would move forward (*DAILY*, June 21). Under the original schedule, the Air Force was to issue an RFP in August and select a prime contractor in early 2003.

The Air Force now is looking at a six-month slip from the original schedule, something which the defense official says is certainly a "concern." It is not clear how much the RFP delay will affect first launch, the official said, but "all of those dates are part of a flow, and when you start to slip anything to the right, everything starts to slide."

The Pentagon leadership won't know for sure how the delay will affect the GPS III program until the Air Force submits its program objective memorandum (POM) later this month. The POM, which outlines the services' future defense spending plans, should provide the new timeline for the GPS III program.

The requirements for GPS III remain firm, however. The official said the expected 20 dB signal increase, which will provide about 100 times the power of the current GPS signal, still is a critical part of the program and remains a "key driver."

In the meantime, Lockheed Martin and Boeing continue to work on upgrades to the GPS IIR-M and IIF satellites. The DOD wants to enhance signals on those satellites by 10 db, which will make them harder to jam (*DAILY*, April 19).

The first upgraded satellites were to launch as early as October 2003, but that schedule has been pushed back by three to four months, the defense official said. That is mainly because of the "launch on need" policy the Air Force follows with GPS satellite replacements, whereby new satellites are launched to replace failing ones.

The Air Force has looked at the possibility of launching the enhanced satellites earlier, even before the older satellites failed (*DAILY*, May 29). That plan seems to have gone by the wayside, however.

"It's kind of a difficult sticking point," the defense official said, because the Air Force is only funded to go at a given speed and they don't see any need to dispose of a satellite that is still functioning.

Technically, there are no real problems with enhancing the satellites, according to the official. "The contractors think this is fairly straightforward," he said.

One issue still being resolved is how the upgrades will fit into DOD spectrum management policy.

"There are some concerns with the ability to broadcast at the higher powers and not adversely affect some legacy receivers in the field - both military and civil," he said.

The upgrades are being partially funded with fiscal year 2002 funds, but the Air Force is depending on FY '03 funds to move forward. The House and Senate versions of the FY '03 defense authorization bill cut the funds requested for upgrading the GPS IIR-M and IIF satellites.

The Pentagon is appealing those cuts, and the official said he is optimistic the funds would be restored in a House-Senate conference.